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PAUL'S ESCHATOLOGY

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I. THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF PAUL'S THOUGHT

Paul's religion was grounded in eschatology. His hopes and motives in life, the passion and urgency of his religion, center in his conception of the future. Any thorough study of Paul's religion should begin, not end, with the study of his eschatology.

The religion in which Paul was reared also found its practical center in eschatology. Its center was the messianic hope, that heart of Judaism which, living and throbbing, sent the warm life-blood of a vital religion through the body of Jewish thought. Paul belonged to the Pharisaic school of Judaism, but we must remember that the Pharisee was not always a formalist. With all Paul's self-accusation, he never charges himself with that. No one man ever stands alone in religion. His general point of view is always that of a social group. Even without the testimony of such books of deep devotion as the Pharisaic Psalms of Solomon we should conclude that with many Pharisees the outward religious forms were the expression of a deep inward longing after God.

Our first impulse is to interpret a phrase like "longing after God" in the sense of individual aspiration. Thus most of our Christian literature interprets it. This individual interpretation may take either one of two forms: the aspiration for God in heaven—an individual eschatology—or the aspiration for a mystical communion with God in the present life. Only a few are so filled with the social ideal that the phrase, "longing after God," suggests first a desire that present society be so transformed as to express perfect righteousness. When a man expresses such a desire, he is usually called a socialist.

The Jewish messianic hope, with its longing after God, was none of these aspirations, though it comes nearer to the last than to either of the others. Instead of being individually eschatological,

it was socially eschatological, a form of thought which the Christian church has scarcely known since the first century of its history. The pious Jew hoped to share in the messianic kingdom, but, if we may judge from either Jewish writings or the Pauline letters, his expectation centered less upon his individual pleasure in it than upon the glory of his nation. Paul represented the ideal pious Jew when he said, "I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake." A large part of the great power which the messianic hope had in Judaism was beyond doubt due to the fact that it was not selfishly personal. It was national, social, expressing a solidarity which always makes religion a powerful human force.

A great hope in religion always embodies itself in conceptions and pictures more or less definite in detail. The imagination refuses to lie quiet when the mind is filled with a glorious and vital anticipation. So imagination had wrought upon the messianic hope. The results fall into two classes—conceptions and visions.

The details of the messianic hope in pre-Pauline Judaism do not make a consistent system either in conceptions or in visions. This is not merely because the Hebrews were not system builders, but because the authoritative books of the religion were openly at variance with each other and with the current Jewish thought of the first Christian century. The picture of the future of the nation is not wholly a unity, and the future of the individual is vague and variant. In most of the books of the Old Testament individual destiny counts for little and is swallowed up in the destiny of the nation. There are frequent references to the belief in a shadowy life in Sheol, a life weak and not to be desired (Job 26:5; Isa. 14:9-17), cut off even from knowledge of this world (Job 14:12,21), the abode of good men and evil men alike (I Sam. 28:19; Job 3:17). This belief was an old pagan conception, akin to primitive beliefs in all parts of the world, and, for Israel, it always remained pagan. Jehovah was the God of the living and not of the dead, and the shades were never brought under his sway. "In Sheol who shall give thee thanks?" (Ps. 6:5). "The dead praise not the Lord" (Ps. 115:17; see Isa. 38:18). Gradually this primitive idea of the shades vanished from Hebrew thought, for the divine drama

centered about the earth and the development of the destiny of Israel. But the more glorious that destiny, the more tragic was the problem of the individual. He might love and suffer much for his nation, but in the land of silence and the shadow of death no good would accrue to him for it. The social and political situation made the problem still more strenuous. The nations rode by in state and glory, while Israel bent its captive neck to the yoke. They poured insolent scorn on Jehovah, and Jehovah sat quiet, as though it were he and not the idols that was deaf and blind. Could Jehovah be ever indifferent to justice? Must not the future hold an answer to the riddle of righteousness? From this problem of justice arose the hope embodied in the doctrine of the resurrection. In the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes definitely rejects the hope. Twice it is clearly expressed, both times in late sections: Isa. 26:19;¹ Dan. 12:1-3. Those to whom this life has not brought just punishment or reward—not all men—will come back from Sheol, "the land of the dust," and awake again to life; and so justice will at last be done. Further complications arise from the fact that Jewish belief did not cease development with the last canonical books. A great number of questions persistently demanded answer. Can one say that exact justice has ever been done in this life? If not, must not all men be raised if any are to be? Is the resurrection before or after the messianic age? How will the righteous be rewarded and the wicked punished? Will the "day of Jehovah" be a definite judgment day? If so, is it before or after the messianic age? Will that age be temporary or endless? If temporary, what will come after it? Will the Messiah or Jehovah conduct the judgment? What will be the end of the unjust? Such questions as these still stood to be answered. The rise of Christianity falls in the time when variant answers were returned to most of these questions.

The Jewish eschatology of this period is to be found most fully in the apocalyptic books. How far such books were influential in the rabbinical circles where Paul's thought took form is an unsolved question. With their bizarre figures and their extrava-

¹ Isa., chaps. 24-27, is one of the very late portions of the book, though the exact date is not easy to determine.

gant hopes, they do not seem to belong to the same class of thought as the rather cool reasoning of the rabbis, nor are they referred to in literature which comes from the rabbis, like the "Sayings of the Fathers" or the older parts of the Talmud. It has been questioned whether the rabbis did not look askance at them. Their fundamental ideas, however, are certainly the same as those which form the background of Pharisaic thought, and these general ideas, together with some particular features of the apocalyptic pictures, are found in the Pauline epistles.

The following apocalyptic writings, outside the canon, preceded Paul's epistles in time, and therefore may have been known to him: Enoch, usually known as the Ethiopic Enoch, from the language in which it has come to modern times, and divided into parts assigned to different dates: chaps. 1-36, 37-70, 72-90, 91-104, with various interpolations, as chaps. 70-71; the Slavonic Enoch; the Book of Jubilees; the Assumption of Moses. The following positions taken by the writers of these books on some of the eschatological details will show how far this subject was from being a unity in Paul's day. The varieties here represented are probably by no means all that could be found in Paul's Jewish environment, did we know it better.

The state after death.—The good and evil receive rewards and punishments even before the resurrection, Enoch, chaps. 1-36; the wicked are punished immediately after death, and do not share in the resurrection, Enoch, chaps. 90-104; the righteous enter upon blessedness immediately after death, Jubilees.

Events preceding the end of the age.—Evil will become stronger, then God will appear in person and overturn the wicked, Enoch, chaps. 83-90; the righteous will slay the wicked, Enoch, chaps. 90-104; evil will become stronger, Enoch, chaps. 37-70; great and bitter evils will come upon the righteous, then Israel will turn to God and enjoy long life and peace, Jubilees.

The resurrection.—Of all Israel, both good and bad, Enoch, chaps. 1-36; of righteous Israelites only, Enoch, chaps. 83-90; of all Israel but no others, Enoch, chaps. 37-70; not bodily but spiritual, Enoch, chaps. 91-104, Assumption of Moses, Slavonic Enoch; no resurrection, but immortality at death, Jubilees.

The judgment.—Before the messianic age, Enoch, chaps. 1-36; after the messianic age, Enoch, chaps. 71-104, Slavonic Enoch; administered by the Messiah, only in Enoch, chaps. 37-70, in other writings, by God himself.

The Messiah.—No Messiah, Enoch, chaps. 1-36, Jubilees, Assumption of Moses, Slavonic Enoch; appears after the judgment and has no special function, Enoch, chaps. 83-90; a spiritual, supernatural being, who overcomes evil, judges men and angels, inaugurates and rules over the messianic age, Enoch, chaps. 31-70.

The messianic kingdom.—Earthly, centered at Jerusalem, eternal, the gentiles converted, Enoch, chaps. 1-36; in a heavenly Jerusalem, Enoch, chaps. 83-90; eternal, in a new heaven and earth, only for Israel, Enoch, chaps. 37-70; temporal, on this earth, Enoch, chaps. 91-104, Jubilees, Assumption of Moses, Slavonic Enoch.

There is something extremely modern in this variety of presentation. Much the same thing meets the student of any subject which is taking shape in the present day. He can sympathize with the young rabbi Saul, if that student in Jerusalem ever conned the rolls of these books. Variety in any age, however, does not create hopeless confusion so long as a unified point of view lies behind it. It is doubtful if the apocalyptic differences disturbed Paul's pre-Christian thought any more than the differences of science or of economics disturb the thought of the modern student, living in the progressive atmosphere of the modern world. The important thing is always the point of view, the general attitude toward the world and life. In the age of Paul, the attitude was the same, whether expressed in apocalyptic pictures or in rabbinical reasoning; apocalypse only brings it to view somewhat more clearly. Its first element is a contrast between God and the world. The world is evil. It cannot be made good except by overthrow and reconstruction. Revolution, not evolution, is the key to the world's history. Evil now rules the world, and God sits by and allows it, reserving his power for the present, while evil waxes stronger and stronger. The second element is an abiding optimism. God cannot allow evil wholly to triumph. When evil becomes so strong that it will seem almost to have won the battle, God will

suddenly overthrow it. The right will finally triumph, not by the power of man, but by the might of the omnipotent God. This element furnishes the basis for a great inspiration to faith. The third element is the issue in practical life. The faithful man must not despair, for evil is only temporary; nor must he attempt to force the overthrow of evil, for God himself will overthrow it in his own time. It is man's part to wait patiently and hold faith in God. That is no task for a moral weakling. It requires all the strength religion can produce to hold men to an abiding faith in God when everything seems to combine to throw discredit upon his power.

These were the religious preconceptions in which Paul was trained. They are different in some respects from the preconceptions of modern religion. We are not dualists. We assume the world to be a universe, with a single purpose running through it. History and God are not at variance. Rather is history the manifestation of God in the development of men. Nor does evil seem to most of us to be growing stronger. History is evolution, not revolution, and the giant wrongs of the world will need no sharp, final blow by supernatural power for their overthrow. To appreciate the position of the Jew we must reverse our easy optimistic views of history and think how it would seem to hold our belief in the final triumph of right by means of the dead lift of faith.

Now think of Paul, holding, by the sheer will power of faith, this hope for a final triumph of good in a dimly distant future, suddenly brought to face, in what he believed to be a real personal interview, with a man believed by some to be the Messiah, but formerly held by Paul to be no better than an impostor. The man had died, and his disciples claimed that God had raised him from the dead and thereby confirmed him as the Messiah. And now this man appears to him. His only conclusion can be that the disciples are right, and the man is the Messiah. We are not now concerned with the explanation of the vision on the way to Damascus. We are trying to look at it from Paul's own point of view.

This event affected the eschatology of Paul in three ways. First, it brought the final triumph of God over evil very near, and

so made it both vivid and dominant in his thought. If the Messiah had already appeared on earth, the final and triumphant manifestation could not be far distant. "Maranatha," "The Lord cometh," is henceforward Paul's watchword in common with other Christians. Second, it laid strong emphasis upon the resurrection of Christ and of believers. The thought of Paul centers about the resurrection life much more than the thought of any of the gospel writers. Third, it gave a starting-point to vivid, almost pictorial speculations about the nature of the resurrection body, and made the doctrine not an abstraction, but a concrete, living reality.

This, then, is the groundwork of Paul's eschatology; largely the fundamental religious conceptions of Judaism, only modified so far as was necessary by the belief that Jesus was the Messiah.

We may conclude from what is said above that Paul began his Christian career with the following fundamental eschatological conceptions: (1) Jesus is the Messiah. (2) The Messiah will come again soon, to inaugurate his kingdom. (3) That kingdom will be one of triumph and glory for the Messiah and his people. (4) The time preceding it will grow worse and worse till the end. (5) The final triumph of God will be the overthrow of evil in a whirlwind of supernatural power. (6) The messianic age will be accompanied, at either its beginning or its end, by a divine judgment upon all living men. (7) The righteous dead will be raised with visible bodily forms, but not necessarily with material substance, and share in the messianic triumph.

We notice again the social rather than individual character of this messianic hope. Its center is not an individual immortal life, but a glorious community of the followers of the Messiah. Nor did the hope take speculative form. We cannot presume to say what were Paul's assumptions at the beginning of his Christian career as to the duration of the messianic kingdom; its place, whether earthly or heavenly; the intermediate state of the righteous dead; the problem of the resurrection of the wicked, or the duration of their punishment. The ideas which we may assume he had were not speculative, but practical, and adapted to make the basis of a living religious hope.

The student of Paul's eschatology should always remember that we have, properly speaking, no Pauline theology, but only inferences drawn from certain letters, written, not for speculative, but for practical and ethical purposes. We shall expect, therefore, to find only a fragmentary and incomplete system of theology. We can never tell whether such a system represents the whole of Paul's thought on any subject. His religion is always more fully represented than his theology.

Paul's use of "the Kingdom" is mostly future. See I Cor. 6:9; 15:24, 50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 4:11; I Thess. 2:12; II Thess. 1:5. Only three times (Rom. 14:17; I Cor. 4:20; Col. 1:13) does it seem to be used of the present. Paul's independence of Christ's formal teaching is seen in this reversal of uses; for with Christ the kingdom was more often present than future. To Paul, Christianity was a confident expectation of the glorious messianic kingdom whose hope had come to be so important in later Judaism.

2. WORLD HISTORY

The Pauline writings present two definite statements of world history, II Thess., chap. 2, and Rom., chap. 11. They differ from each other so radically as to have produced a belief, very widespread fifty years ago, that II Thess. could not be Pauline. Present scholarship, with perhaps greater appreciation of human flexibility, is more inclined to solve the problem by allowing a change of emphasis or, if necessary, even of point of view, under the shifting circumstances of Paul's life. II Thess. 2:1-12 is the most concise presentation of apocalyptic ideas in the New Testament. The movements of history it presents are threefold: The abolition of some present "power that restrains"; the exaltation of a power that is evil; the supernatural overthrow of this power at the coming of the Messiah. The general conception of the course of future history is clear. There will be a growing evil which will culminate in deceit of men and blasphemy of God before the Messiah comes. The Jewish sources of this conception are also clear. Behind the apocalyptic books stands the ideal conflict of "Gog of the land of Magog," distant and terrible tribes from Scythia, which came to be the types of the forces of evil (Ezek., chaps.

38-39). Whether the Babylonian dragon myth also stands behind this ideal figure of the enemy of God is of less concern.² It would not be surprising if it did, for tales travel widely in religion and are sometimes found in most unexpected quarters, as when Buddha appears as St. Josaphat in the Christian list of saints.

The details of the picture are obscure. Paul attempts no explanation, but only reminds the Thessalonians of what he has already told them orally (vs. 5). The details concern two problems: Who is "the lawless one"? What is the power which now "restrains" the lawless one? Both the lawless one and the restraining power are now in existence (vs. 7). The lawless one is not yet revealed, his existence is hidden, or latent in some other movement. The revelation will be connected with an apostasy, a word only used in the New Testament and the Septuagint, meaning departing from Jehovah (see Acts 21:21; Jer. 2:19; I Macc. 2:15). With this meaning agrees the term, "The lawless one," and the prediction that he will occupy (in fact or in figure) the temple of God. It is difficult to think of these terms as expressing anything except a Jewish origin for the "lawless one," and, on the other hand, it is almost as difficult to think of Paul as supposing that the monotheistic Jews would be led away by one who asserted himself to be God (vs. 9). How can this be a false Messiah, for the Messiah was not God in Jewish estimation? It seems impossible now to recover with any certainty the exact picture which Paul had in mind when he used these terms of vague meaning. The important thing is after all the general conception, and that is clear. Evil will lift itself up, will lead many astray and will seem to gain the seat of God himself, and the germ of this evil is already in the world. In Paul's mind was the idea concerning the increase of evil before the coming of the Messiah which led to the Jewish term, "the birth pangs of the Messiah."

Some power now holds back this development of evil. It must be removed before "the lawless one" can flaunt his defiance openly. That this power is the Roman Empire seems most probable. To Paul, the Roman Empire was the protector, not the assailant, of the church. Its officers had always protected

² See Bousset, *The Legend of Antichrist*, for a full statement of this dragon myth.

him. He could not have appreciated the fierce hate of Rome which stirred the writer of *Rev.*, chaps. 17, 18. Why, then, did he think that Rome, great and imposing as its imperial power must have seemed to Paul, who had wandered for years within its borders, would fall, and that speedily? The only answer which one can give is the strength of the Jewish expectation of a tremendous force of evil opposing and persecuting the people of God.

A little later Rome herself, in her persecution of the Christians, fulfilled this expectation. As yet Paul saw no signs of such opposition in Rome. The empire, therefore, must give way to another power. It seems like an expectation in the light of a preconceived idea. Jewish thought held that before the appearance of the messianic kingdom a power of evil must develop, severely trying the souls of the people of God, and Paul could not lay aside the idea. If this seems an insufficient reason for a religious conception, it is well to consider how many people hold religious ideas on the same basis. Remember, too, that this idea had much real religious value to the Jew. It called out his faith and courage and bound him closer to his God. Such ideas are not laid aside without good reasons and Christianity had presented no reason whatever to Paul for his abandonment of this conception.³

If Paul carries over common Jewish thought in his idea of the future, he adds a distinctly Christian element in the idea of the time when this hope will be realized. When the disciples asked Jesus, according to the story in the Acts, "Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" they expressed an expectation which lived in Christian minds as long as Christianity was Jewish and messianic. As soon as the Jews were ready for him the Messiah would come. I *Thess.* expresses the hope that this will take place in the lifetime of some of the readers—"We," said Paul, "shall be caught up in the clouds." His historical prospect in II *Thess.* is not designed to contradict it, but only so to modify the Thessalonian interpretation that they shall not think of the Lord's coming as imminent (12:2). The Thessalonian Christians

³ If we could be sure, which we cannot, that the apocalyptic discourse in *Mark*, chap. 13, and parallels, represented in all respects Christ's teaching, we should be obliged to question whether Paul's conception did not rest in part on Jesus' own teaching; cf. *Mark* 13:5-8, 21-23.

seem to have thought of the time in terms of days and weeks. Paul thought of it in terms of years, but not of generations nor centuries. This was, we repeat, not Paul's idea only. He had taken it over bodily from his Christian comrades. Such an idea may always receive modification, sometimes unconsciously, without affecting the main contents of a system of thought.

On this subject, then, Paul repeated two thoughts, one Jewish and one Christian, and added to neither anything which we can be sure was his own.

In a writing some years later he presents another plan of world-history. In Rom. 11:25-32 he expresses a confident belief in the bringing in of the gentiles to be followed by a gathering of all Israel, so that gentile and Jew alike shall be included in the messianic kingdom. There are Jewish elements in this belief. That all purified Israel should be in the messianic kingdom was the common hope from the days of the prophets (Isa. 64:1-5; Zech. 13:9). Paul does not mean that every Israelite will be a member of the kingdom. He is dealing in terms of the nation as a whole. Nor is the idea that the gentiles shall share the kingdom entirely new, even though the more usual prophetic thought was that the gentiles should be subjects of glorified Israel, and the apocalyptic thought was that the gentiles should be utterly destroyed. The broader and more humane idea is found in Isa. 2:1-4 and occurs occasionally in the writings of Judaism, as Psalms of Solomon 17:33-35, "And he shall purge Jerusalem and make it holy even as it was in the days of old, so that the nations may come from the ends of the earth to see his glory, bringing as gifts her sons that had fainted, and may see the glory of the Lord, wherewith God hath glorified her." Paul, writing to the partly gentile Roman church, naturally turned to this form of the messianic hope. One thing seems to be entirely new. It is the relation between the rejection of Christ by the Jews and the entrance of the gentiles into the messianic kingdom. That grew out of his own experiences. As a matter of fact, the rejection of Christianity by the Jews had opened the door to the gentiles. The stories of Acts, even allowing something for a schematic presentation of facts, show beyond question that the Jewish rejection caused

Christian missionaries to turn to the gentiles. Paul already saw that without the Jewish rejection the gentile churches would not have been founded. Had Jesus been accepted by the Jewish nation as the Messiah the religion of Jesus would never, so far as we can see, have penetrated into the gentile world, and his name today would be as little known to European civilization as the name of Bar Cochba. The Jewish rejection was, so Paul reasoned, but making more glorious the messianic kingdom which the Jewish prophets foretold. This conception must have been a great encouragement to Paul. A strong man may be able to hold faith in the wisdom and goodness of God when he is unable to see any outlook for good in the course of present history, but even a strong faith is made easier and more triumphant when it is able to see that its pathway leads toward the heights. For the timid Jewish Christian, the Jewish rejection of Jesus must have seemed the hardest thing to bear. This bold speculation of Paul, based as it was on the present facts of history, flanked the enemies' strongest position, captured its stoutest citadel. Paul had read the plans of God in the revelations of passing history. It is no wonder that he ends with a doxology, "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!"

This passage in Romans seems to belong to a different sphere of thought from that in II Thess. It has no characteristics of apocalyptic. It conceives history as evolution, not revolution. It seems to have no place for the culmination of evil in the reign of the "lawless one." Not a triumph of evil, but a triumph of good is the prelude to the messianic kingdom. The two conceptions may not be quite mutually exclusive, but they belong to different spheres of thought.

Quite as difficult to harmonize is the matter of time. I Thess. puts the coming of the messianic kingdom within this generation. It is difficult to see how Paul could conceive of the wide spread of Christianity in the gentile world, then its conquest of Judaism, as within this brief time, but evidently he did, for to the end of his writings, even when he himself no longer desired to be alive at Christ's coming (Phil. 1:22 f.), he exhorts to faithfulness because of the shortness of the time (Phil. 4:5). It is not necessary to

suppose, as do some,⁴ that Paul had definitely changed his opinions on this subject. Doubtless his mind had changed its emphasis. Doubtless we, looking at the two passages from outside, find it impossible to reconcile them. But is the modern man, engaged in active promotion of causes, always wholly consistent in his opinion? The real situation seems to be this: Two systems of thought about future history were in Paul's mind. One was the traditional apocalyptic system, which also had been taken over bodily by the Christian leaders (see Mark, chap. 13, and the Book of Revelation). The other was the outcome of his own study of the prophets, coupled with his experience and observation of the course of gospel progress. The modern world is full of like compounds of tradition and experience, quite as much at variance, but held without recognition of their incongruity. Nowhere are such combinations of ideas more common than in religion, and especially in times of transition. Shall we not allow Paul also to have been a man subject to the universal mental qualities of human kind? No man in times of transition escapes contradictions. We find them in Luther and Calvin, as well as in lesser men. Paul was a stout reasoner, but his mind was not a mechanical logic machine devoid of human qualities. On more than one point his opinions were not completely systematized.

⁴ See Charles, *Eschatology, Hebrew, Jewish, and Christian*, pp. 397 ff.

[To be concluded in the September "Biblical World"]